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Presentation Abstract:

That “Old” Manual: The Manual of Surveying Instructions Next Edition and the Modern Cadastre

The Cadastre effects state policies. The Cadastral is an important but often overlooked system of exerting political and economic control over land. Cadastral Surveys, when conducted correctly, promotes orderly settlement, Justice and domestic Tranquility. The Manual of Instructions for the Survey of the Public Lands of the United States (Manual) describes how cadastral surveys of the Public Land Survey System (PLSS) and federally administer lands are made in conformance to statutory law and its judicial interpretation.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) believes in the importance of informing the affected entities and individuals that the next edition of the Manual is being prepared. The earliest rules governing the survey of the public lands were issued in manuscript, and in printed circulars dating from 1785. Previous editions of the Manual were issued in 1855, 1864, 1881, 1890, 1894, 1902, 1930, and 1947, with the current edition issued in 1973.

The Manuals of Surveying Instructions have been revised with a view of harmonizing the printed instructions with current legislation, judicial and administrative decisions, and surveying practice. Since 1973, much has happened in law and policy in defining land boundaries. Although the laws, policies and controlling cases are public, there is no system for their compilation; therefore they are not readily available to practitioners. The next edition of the Manual will include relevant law and policies of surveying and boundaries as they have developed since 1973.

The Manual is of interest to county, mineral, and local surveyors, attorneys, title insurance company personnel, real estate agents, and others who have professional interests in land and interests in land defined by the PLSS. Thirty States have been created out of the public domain. Indian lands are to be surveyed as nearly as may be in conformity to the rules and regulations under which other public lands are surveyed. The Manual sets out the field and office procedure to be followed in the execution of mineral surveys.

It is important to remember that in most cases where no federal or Indian trust lands are involved, the methods and explanations of the BLM must be regarded as advisory only, as the BLM is generally without jurisdiction unless federal or Indian trust lands are involved.

The BLM and the Department of the Interior have yet to finalize the public participation process. There are many administrative details yet to be worked out in this multi-year endeavor. A web site, <http://www.blm.gov/cadastral/Manual/nextedition.htm> has been established to provide information on the progress of the next edition. Interested persons can track the progress via the Next Edition web site.

Cadastre – An official register of the quantity, value, location, and ownership of real estate used in apportioning taxes.

Cadastral – of or relating to a cadastre; showing or recording property boundaries, subdivision lines, buildings, and related details.

Cadastral Survey - creates (or reestablishes), marks, and defines boundaries of tracts of land, all subject to approval of the Director, Bureau of Land Management.

